

Ben Holloday, owner of the Overland Mail Company. He sold out to Wells Fargo.

could win, at least not at that time. In 1851, as a personal favor to Brigham Young, he carried mail west on his freight wagons to Utah, and in 1853 he was associated with W.L. Blanchard, an early mail contractor. Without fanfare Holloday began buying mortgages on freight and stage companies, and also owned interests in railroads and river boat shipping. It was his policy to loan small firms money until he obtained controlling interest in them, and then foreclose for debts due. During the Utah War he made huge profits and invested them wisely. He didn't waste his money developing stage or freight companies; he let others do that, and then bought them out for next to nothing when their treasuries were bankrupt. Some called him grasping and tight-fisted, others called him shrewd!

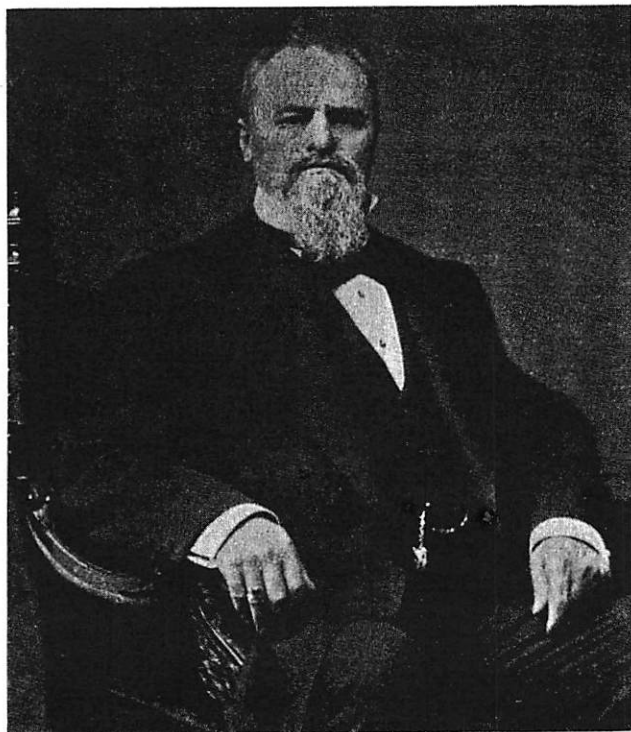
An example of the sometimes questionable methods he employed occurred in July, 1859, in a conspiracy with William Russell and Russell's personal friend, John B. Floyd, who was then Secretary of War. It may

equipment with a bank draft which had been signed in advance by William H. Russell!

When Holloday foreclosed on the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express, he retained his cousin, Bela Hughes, who had been president of the firm, as his legal counsel. But little else remained unchanged. He changed the line's name to the Overland Mail Company, and ordered that all of the rolling stock, including the new Concord coaches recently acquired from the defunct Butterfield line, be painted scarlet red with ebony black trim. A major change included rerouting the line to a shorter and faster road. Where the line had followed the North Platte River to Julesburg and then turned south to Denver, Holloday chose to route his stages from Julesburg west along the South Platte River to the Cache La Poudre River, a route then known as the Cherokee Trail, completely bypassing Denver. After the change, Denver was served only twice each week on a branch line from Julesburg. West of Latham Station on the Cache La Poudre, the trail went via Virginia Dale (the last station in Colorado), and then north to Medicine Bow and Fort Halleck in Wyoming. From there the trail continued west through Bridger's Pass to Bitter Creek, which it followed to Green River, Fort Bridger and Salt Lake City. It was a long and desolate route, crossing both the Red Desert and the Twenty Mile Desert. (See Table #4 for a listing of stations and approximate miles between each on the Overland Mail Line.)

The condition of the mail line when it was acquired by Holloday was not the best, although little of the fault could be laid at the door of Russell, Majors & Waddell who had spent a fortune outfitting it. Indian troubles had caused considerable damage to the line; but Holloday's greatest problem of immediate concern proved to be the winter of 1861-62. At almost any time at least part of the road between the Platte River and Salt Lake City was closed by deep snow drifts. From Salt Lake City west it was said that half of the line was under water, flooded when normally dry desert washes were turned into raging torrents by torrential rains and melting snow. Echo Canyon was a quagmire of mud. From Bromley's Station it took the stage three days to go ten miles! The entire line seemed to be broken down, and where weather hadn't brought the mail to a standstill, Indian attacks did.

All across Wyoming, Indians burned stations and stole livestock from corrals and barns. Not a single change of horses remained at Red Buttes, the Dry Sandy,



Ben Holloday, owner of the Overland Mail Company. He sold out to Wells Fargo.

could win, at least not at that time. In 1851, as a personal favor to Brigham Young, he carried mail west on his freight wagons to Utah, and in 1853 he was associated with W.L. Blanchard, an early mail contractor. Without fanfare Holloday began buying mortgages on freight and stage companies, and also owned interests in railroads and river boat shipping. It was his policy to loan small firms money until he obtained controlling interest in them, and then foreclose for debts due. During the Utah War he made huge profits and invested them wisely. He didn't waste his money developing stage or freight companies; he let others do that, and then bought them out for next to nothing when their treasuries were bankrupt. Some called him grasping and tight-fisted, others called him shrewd!

An example of the sometimes questionable methods he employed occurred in July, 1859, in a conspiracy with William Russell and Russell's personal friend, John B. Floyd, who was then Secretary of War. It may

equipment with a bank draft which had been signed in advance by William H. Russell!

When Holloday foreclosed on the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express, he retained his cousin, Bela Hughes, who had been president of the firm, as his legal counsel. But little else remained unchanged. He changed the line's name to the Overland Mail Company, and ordered that all of the rolling stock, including the new Concord coaches recently acquired from the defunct Butterfield line, be painted scarlet red with ebony black trim. A major change included rerouting the line to a shorter and faster road. Where the line had followed the North Platte River to Julesburg and then turned south to Denver, Holloday chose to route his stages from Julesburg west along the South Platte River to the Cache La Poudre River, a route then known as the Cherokee Trail, completely bypassing Denver. After the change, Denver was served only twice each week on a branch line from Julesburg. West of Latham Station on the Cache La Poudre, the trail went via Virginia Dale (the last station in Colorado), and then north to Medicine Bow and Fort Halleck in Wyoming. From there the trail continued west through Bridger's Pass to Bitter Creek, which it followed to Green River, Fort Bridger and Salt Lake City. It was a long and desolate route, crossing both the Red Desert and the Twenty Mile Desert. (See Table #4 for a listing of stations and approximate miles between each on the Overland Mail Line.)

The condition of the mail line when it was acquired by Holloday was not the best, although little of the fault could be laid at the door of Russell, Majors & Waddell who had spent a fortune outfitting it. Indian troubles had caused considerable damage to the line; but Holloday's greatest problem of immediate concern proved to be the winter of 1861-62. At almost any time at least part of the road between the Platte River and Salt Lake City was closed by deep snow drifts. From Salt Lake City west it was said that half of the line was under water, flooded when normally dry desert washes were turned into raging torrents by torrential rains and melting snow. Echo Canyon was a quagmire of mud. From Bromley's Station it took the stage three days to go ten miles! The entire line seemed to be broken down, and where weather hadn't brought the mail to a standstill, Indian attacks did.

All across Wyoming, Indians burned stations and stole livestock from corrals and barns. Not a single change of horses remained at Red Buttes, the Dry Sandy,

BEN HOLLODAY IN CONTROL

On November 22, 1861, Ben Holloday was given a mortgage on the entire Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express, after purchasing Russell, Majors & Waddell bonds in the amount of \$400,000—the bonds to fall due in three years. Only three weeks later Holloday presented the bonds for payment in full, at the same time demanding payment of an additional \$200,000 he had loaned the firm earlier. He did so by claiming that the three partners had not operated the company in a proper and business-like manner. The matter was contested and the company was placed in the hands of a trustee, who then advertised that an auction of the huge stage company and all of its assets would be held only three weeks later. Appeals delayed the sale for several weeks more, but on March 2, 1862, Ben Holloday purchased the entire Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express with all of its assets for only \$100,000. He was the sole bidder. Who was this man, Ben Holloday, who had outwitted the wily William Russell, along with Alexander Majors and William Waddell, and beat them at their own game?

Ben Holloday was born in 1819 near Blue Lick, Kentucky, one of six sons of William Holloday. He grew up to be a good farmhand who knew livestock well, but he was only a mediocre student and received little formal education. While still a teenager he ran away from home, making his way to the Missouri frontier, where he worked in saloons, as a hotel clerk and as a gambler. He soon gained a reputation for being a loud and coarse ruffian, one overly fond of whiskey. At the outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846, Holloday turned to freighting, and from the profits he made banked enough money to purchase surplus wagons and livestock from the army when the war ended.

Early on Holloday had become a personal friend of Brigham Young, during the Mormons' troubles in Missouri. In 1849 he freighted fifty wagons loaded with \$70,000 worth of trade goods to Salt Lake City, where because of his friendship with the Mormon leader, he sold the merchandise at a high profit. With the receipts of his freighting venture, Holloday purchased cheap Mormon cattle at six dollars a head and flour for only one dollar per sack, which he then took to California and sold to hungry gold miners, making an enormous profit. Flour which had cost him only one dollar at Salt

Lake City sold in California for twenty dollars! Already he had acquired the Midas touch for which he would become known.

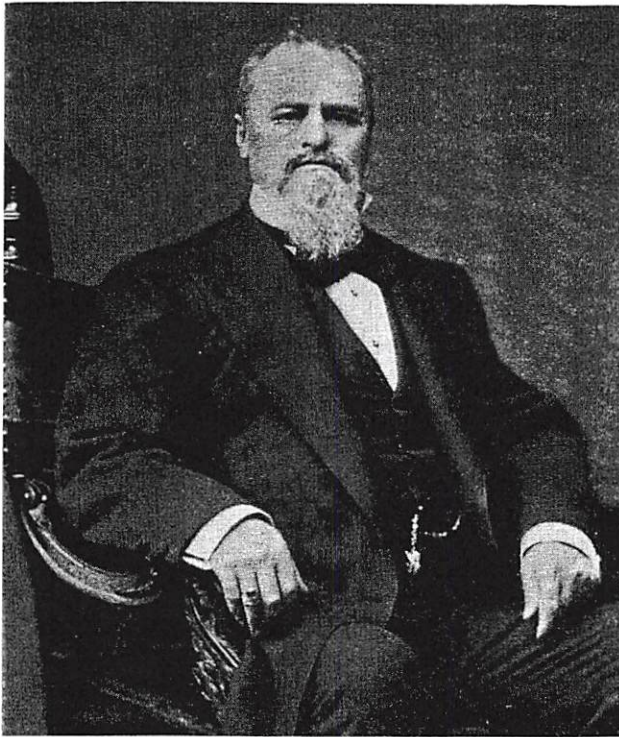
Those who knew him best described Holloday in different ways, according to their contacts with him. Captain William Banning, one of the early stagers in California and a man who knew him as well as anyone, did not consider Holloday to be a good stagecoach man.

He was not a Birch or a Butterfield, but still he was a shrewd businessman, with faults of disposition and education, often haughty and dictatorial. A man inspired by a love of amassing a fortune, he would tackle anything which would gain him that end.

But Banning also noted that Holloday was "Brave, aggressive, strong and generous." John Hailey, the Idaho stagecoach king, later remembered Holloday as being, "Above average in size, strong in stature with a commanding appearance, sociable and far-seeing. In common conversation his voice would carry across the street." Another contemporary described him as being "Tall, large framed, with sharp, dark eyes and a dark mustache, good looking and picturesque." But still another said, "He was illiterate, coarse, boastful, false and cunning!" The truth was probably somewhere in between, but to almost everyone, he was an enigma.

That Holloday was devious and crafty was unquestioned, as he frequently demonstrated those traits. One reported incident regarded a fraudulent flour deal he made during the army's wartime expedition during the Utah War. The army required large quantities of flour, which Holloday agreed to purchase in Missouri at seven dollars per hundred-weight and freight to Utah at a cost of twenty-two dollars per hundred-weight. The contract was signed, but through his contacts with Brigham Young, Holloday secretly purchased four hundred tons of Utah flour for less than he would have paid in Missouri, and sold it to the army in Utah, charging the government high Missouri prices plus the cost of freighting, which had cost him almost nothing. His scheme netted a \$200,000 profit, while the soldiers at Camp Floyd never knew they were eating bread made from Mormon flour!

Holloday had a brief taste of mail contracting early on, but was wise enough to see that it wasn't a game he



Ben Holloday, owner of the Overland Mail Company. He sold out to Wells Fargo.

could win, at least not at that time. In 1851, as a personal favor to Brigham Young, he carried mail west on his freight wagons to Utah, and in 1853 he was associated with W.L. Blanchard, an early mail contractor. Without fanfare Holloday began buying mortgages on freight and stage companies, and also owned interests in railroads and river boat shipping. It was his policy to loan small firms money until he obtained controlling interest in them, and then foreclose for debts due. During the Utah War he made huge profits and invested them wisely. He didn't waste his money developing stage or freight companies; he let others do that, and then bought them out for next to nothing when their treasuries were bankrupt. Some called him grasping and tight-fisted, others called him shrewd!

An example of the sometimes questionable methods he employed occurred in July, 1859, in a conspiracy with William Russell and Russell's personal friend, John B. Floyd, who was then Secretary of War. It may have been only coincidence that Holloday arrived at Camp Floyd, forty miles south of Salt Lake City, just as the quartermaster there received orders from Secretary Floyd to immediately auction off several hundred wagons, mules, harnesses and other paraphernalia. Because of the no notice sale, there was no competition in the bidding, with Holloday purchasing eight hundred mules which had cost the army \$175 each for only \$75 each, several hundred wagons which had cost \$150 for only \$20, as well as other equipment he could use in his freighting business. At the time it may have seemed odd to the quartermaster that Holloday paid for the

equipment with a bank draft which had been signed in advance by William H. Russell!

When Holloday foreclosed on the Central Overland California & Pikes Peak Express, he retained his cousin, Bela Hughes, who had been president of the firm, as his legal counsel. But little else remained unchanged. He changed the line's name to the Overland Mail Company, and ordered that all of the rolling stock, including the new Concord coaches recently acquired from the defunct Butterfield line, be painted scarlet red with ebony black trim. A major change included rerouting the line to a shorter and faster road. Where the line had followed the North Platte River to Julesburg and then turned south to Denver, Holloday chose to route his stages from Julesburg west along the South Platte River to the Cache La Poudre River, a route then known as the Cherokee Trail, completely bypassing Denver. After the change, Denver was served only twice each week on a branch line from Julesburg. West of Latham Station on the Cache La Poudre, the trail went via Virginia Dale (the last station in Colorado), and then north to Medicine Bow and Fort Halleck in Wyoming. From there the trail continued west through Bridger's Pass to Bitter Creek, which it followed to Green River, Fort Bridger and Salt Lake City. It was a long and desolate route, crossing both the Red Desert and the Twenty Mile Desert. (See Table #4 for a listing of stations and approximate miles between each on the Overland Mail Line.)

The condition of the mail line when it was acquired by Holloday was not the best, although little of the fault could be laid at the door of Russell, Majors & Waddell who had spent a fortune outfitting it. Indian troubles had caused considerable damage to the line; but Holloday's greatest problem of immediate concern proved to be the winter of 1861-62. At almost any time at least part of the road between the Platte River and Salt Lake City was closed by deep snow drifts. From Salt Lake City west it was said that half of the line was under water, flooded when normally dry desert washes were turned into raging torrents by torrential rains and melting snow. Echo Canyon was a quagmire of mud. From Bromley's Station it took the stage three days to go ten miles! The entire line seemed to be broken down, and where weather hadn't brought the mail to a standstill, Indian attacks did.

All across Wyoming, Indians burned stations and stole livestock from corrals and barns. Not a single change of horses remained at Red Buttes, the Dry Sandy, Rocky Ridge or Pilot Rock stations. Twenty-six stations were abandoned and the stagecoach was forced off the road between Julesburg and Green River. Indian depredations resulting in burned stations, lost livestock and men killed cost Holloday more than \$100,000. On April 17, 1862, station agent Jack Mallory was killed by Indians at Green River station. Mallory's wife was cook at the station, and according to Mark Twain, "She served the only decent meal between the United States and Salt Lake City!" At Medicine Bow station Indians stole all of the livestock and ransacked the station of all of its

firearms and provisions. Twenty-five horses were driven off at Hams Fork.

By summer, every station from the Platte to Fort Bridger had been burned or was in Indian hands. Holloday appealed for army protection for his stations and for troops to accompany his stages. General Halleck was dispatched to protect the eastern section of the line, while Colonel Patrick Connor was brought from Fort Douglas, located at Salt Lake City, to patrol the western end of the line. But even the army was hard-pressed to stem the attacks. Only 140 miles from Atchison, considered to be the safest part of the road, the stage was attacked and two soldiers were killed.

Before winter slowed the attacks, more stations were raided and more coaches were burned. Only heavily-armed coaches or two or more travelling together were allowed west of Julesburg. One passenger, T.S. Boardman, described an attack on two coaches travelling together along the Sweetwater River. Both teams were killed by the Indians and the coaches stopped.

Everything we could find for protection was piled between the coaches and against the wheels; mail bags, buffalo robes, boxes, etc. James Brown was shot in the left side of his face while Lem Flowers was struck in the hip. William Reed was shot in the back and James Anderson through his left leg. Phil Rogers received two arrows in his right shoulder. The bullets fell like hail among us. About four o'clock PM the Indians withdrew, so we determined to get away. After a fatiguing walk of eight miles, taking our wounded, we reached Three Crossings, where we found that Indians had stolen all of the horses the night before. Yoking two cows to a light wagon, we started for Fort Bridger, two hundred miles to the west, where by travelling in washes by day and under

cover of darkness during the night we arrived safely fifteen days later.

It was Holloday's argument that it was the army's responsibility to control the Indians, and that the more than \$100,000 in losses he had suffered because of Indian depredations was therefore an expense to be paid by the government. Besides, he argued, even with a \$600,000 per year subsidy, he was still losing money on the line. To recoup some of his losses Holloday presented a claim against the Postal Department. After much haggling, the government agreed to pay one-fifth of his claim, but Holloday refused such a pittance, saying, "Apparently the government needs the money more than I do!"

With the protection of army troops, Holloday began rebuilding his line. He personally inspected every mile of road and examined every station. He divided the entire line into three divisions: Atchison to Julesburg, 650 miles; Julesburg to Salt Lake City, 600 miles; and Salt Lake City to Placerville, 650 miles. The entire line was placed under a general superintendent, William Otis, who was paid the unheard-of salary of \$4,000 per year. Each of the three divisions was placed under a superintendent and was divided into three sections, each approximately 200 miles long, with separate agents in charge. Among superintendents and section agents were men like Lem Flowers, the man who had been shot in the Indian attack on the Sweetwater, and James Bromley, who had been a station agent at Echo Canyon. Jack Slade was superintendent of the Bitter Creek Division, which included the desert country of southern Wyoming. One day soon Jack Slade would become a major embarrassment to the Holloday line.



Some "sports" celebrating the start of cross-country staging between St. Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California. (Wyoming State Archives)

Holloday paid his employees well, a driver receiving \$75 per month, while stock tenders were paid \$50. Harness makers and blacksmiths—both indispensable on any stage line—were paid \$100 per month, that at a time when a good day's pay was one dollar. That Holloday was well-liked by his employees is undoubted, as was expressed in a staging song they often sang, a few of the lines of which were as follows:

You ask me for our leader,
I'll soon inform you then,
It's Holloday they call him,
And often only Ben.

If you can read the papers,
It's easy work to scan,
He beats the world at staging,
Or any other man!

But Holloday had a brother who apparently was not as well thought of as was Ben, as was noted in *Letters of a Utah Mail Agent*, by Archer B. Hulbert, dated February 12, 1863:

Ben Holloday's brother, agent for the Eastern Division, Overland Stage, was assaulted and badly injured by a man named Greenleaf, a former employee. Greenleaf was arrested and Holloday was taken for medical attention. A trial was set for 2 PM. At the trial Holloday and his attorney entered the court, where he walked up to Greenleaf, who was standing with a police officer, pointed a pistol to his breast, and shot him dead. Holloday was promptly arrested. Holloday is vicious and depraved in his habits and hasn't a friend at Salt Lake City except for the prostitutes he came here with.

Several days later Hulbert added the following to his notes:

Ben Holloday, at New York City, has sent a lawyer from Atchison, his cousin, Bela Hughes, to defend his brother. Every effort that money and talent can make available will be used to procure an acquittal of the accused. The best thing that can be done is to hang him, but out of respect to his brother and the ignominy it would bring to his name, perhaps it will be better if he is cleared. Either way, we will be rid of him!

New mining discoveries were being made throughout the mountains of Utah and Idaho, and in the deserts of Wyoming and Nevada. Wherever a new mining district promised new camps and settlements, Holloday would establish a branch line to serve it. He purchased thousands of mules and horses to replace those lost to Indian raids to stock his new lines. Concord coaches were ordered from Abbot & Downing to replace those which had been burned as well as for his new roads. Many new employees were also added to the payroll to run those new lines. By 1864 the Overland Mail had extended its lines to include more than twenty-seven hundred miles of road, along which rolled two hundred and sixty coaches, requiring a herd of six thousand horses and mules. Within two years more the old

Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express grew from only twelve hundred miles of road to more than three thousand, with twenty-five hundred employees.

From Atchison to Placerville, Holloday had little competition, except for Louis McLane's Pioneer Line, which operated between Virginia City, Nevada, and Sacramento. In California his coaches connected with the Birch & Stevens California Stage Company. But those who tried to build a competing line or to connect with his road elsewhere didn't fare quite so well. It was charged that whenever someone attempted to establish a competing line or build a branch road to connect with his Overland Mail, Holloday would allow them to lay out their line, build road and stations, and begin service, but would then undercut their fares and carry express at so low a rate that they would soon be forced out of business. And as soon as the new line failed, he would then buy up their road and equipment at bargain prices, and would immediately raise his fares and express charges to the most exorbitant levels.

A startling example of Holloday's ruthlessness with smaller companies was his treatment of the Western Stage Line, one of whose routes extended from Omaha to Nebraska City and continued on to Denver. An especially irritating thorn in Holloday's side was an agreement he had been forced to accept when William Dinsmore agreed not to place John Butterfield's equipment on the Overland Trail in competition with him. Holloday had agreed to pay the Western Stage Company \$14,000 to abandon its route from Fort Kearney to Denver, and under terms of the contract, he agreed to accept the Western's passengers at Fort Kearney and take them to their destination on his stages.

Holloday retaliated by simply refusing to accept the Western's passengers, leaving them stranded at Fort Kearney. Owners of the Western Line appealed to the Postmaster General, who then ordered Holloday to accept the passengers whenever there was room on his coaches. Holloday agreed to do so, but then saw to it that every Overland Mail Stage arriving at Fort Kearney was fully loaded, leaving no room for other passengers. It was observed, however, that many of those on his stages were his own employees, apparently being on board simply to ensure that there was no room for anyone else. By leaving large numbers of stranded passengers, Holloday so undermined the Western Line's business that they were forced to withdraw from competition.

Among Holloday's first branch lines was one from Salt Lake City to the new mines at Boise Basin, to camps like Boise, Idaho City, Placerville and Pioneer City. Early in 1863, Holloday announced that he would begin accepting express shipments from the Boise mines, at a cost of five percent of the bullion's value. That figure was thought by some to be a high cost for shipping treasure, but in view of the hazards of the trail, including marauding Indians and wily road agents, most miners and merchants thought it to be quite reasonable. At that time Holloday did not actually have a stage road to Boise Basin, but he was aware that others were establishing

stage lines. The only line to advertise its service at that time was a local company just getting organized, under the name Ish & Hailey, and operated by John Hailey, soon to become known as the stagecoach king of Idaho. Ish and Hailey's partnership was a short-lived one. Their first stage was dispatched on April 15, 1864; but by early 1866 Ish had sold his interest to Hailey.

For awhile Hailey's stage service was not the most dependable, as Indian problems plagued his line from the start. When Hailey's coaches often failed to get through on schedule, Holloday let it be known that he would probably start his own stage line. Hailey did not resent Holloday's entry into the Idaho stage business; apparently he admired him for entering the field in such a dangerous country. In his reminiscences Hailey later recalled: "Few men if any except Holloday would have engaged in such a hazardous and dangerous business, where it cost several hundred thousand dollars to fit up a road with stations and all equipment necessary for the protection of life and property."

As early as the summer of 1863, Davis, Patterson & Company had established a pony express service from Salt Lake City to the Boise Basin mines, across four hundred miles of rugged trail through Indian country; but the winter of 1863-64 brought an end to their pony mail service. In January, 1864, their rider arrived at Bannack City (later Idaho City), having struggled through hip-deep snow on that terrible trail for twenty-eight days. Davis, Patterson & Company withdrew from the field when Ish & Hailey began regular stagecoach service. Because of Indian depredations and the threat of road agents, many staggers found it safer to build their roads from Boise Basin north to The Dalles in Oregon, or to Walla Walla in Washington, where they could ship their express boxes via sailing ship to San Francisco, a longer and more roundabout but far safer route. In the spring of 1864, a wagon road had been built from Walla Walla to the Boise mines, and soon it was busy with freight wagons and stagecoaches. In places the trail had to be cut with axes and picks through a jungle of underbrush and fallen logs. It was little more than a blazed path through the pine forest. John Hailey's coaches were among the first to follow its rocky and rutted trail.

At Boise Basin, Holloday's new line connected with the Thomas & Greathouse line to The Dalles and with the Thomas & Ruckles line to Walla Walla. The road from Salt Lake City to The Dalles was 950 miles long. That there were already several competing stage lines in the Northwest probably influenced Holloday not to establish his own line beyond Boise; but he did everything he could to ensure that as much of the express as possible being shipped south was taken to Salt Lake City aboard his coaches. When his coaches first hit the road on his new line, they did so without benefit of a mail subsidy; but at camps where no post office had yet been established, Holloday set up his own office, accepting letter mail at twenty-five cents each. With his influence he later obtained a mail contract from Salt Lake City to Walla Walla, but found it to his advantage to sublet

the contract beyond Boise to already established stage lines.

Holloday's Northwest mail contract became effective July 1, 1864, with his first mail-carrying stage leaving Salt Lake City for Boise Basin on August 8th. Indian attacks on the new branch line became so frequent that for the first several months, until substantial stations could be built, his stage was called a tri-weekly—that is, the stage left one week and tried to get back the next! At about the same time he entered the Boise Basin business, Holloday also built a line to the Montana mines, and for a time both roads followed the same route north from Salt Lake City. Stages bound for Boise Basin followed the Montana road as far north as Fort Hall, Idaho, where they turned west to Oregon and Washington. Later, the Boise Basin route was shortened, with stages leaving the Montana road at the crossing of the Bear River, at Hampton's Ford, located north of Corinne, Utah. Holloday's Boise route was not as short or convenient as the road used by John Hailey, whose route followed the foothills of the Raft River Mountains west from Hampton's Ford to the Oakley Meadows, and then north to the Snake River where the Overland Ferry would soon be built. In later years the Hailey route would become one of the main routes from Salt Lake City to the Northwest.

Holloday's new line to the Montana diggings promised rich returns, for the express business was brisk right from the start, with stagecoaches carrying heavy loads of gold dust and nuggets. But the road north to Montana was a long, hard one, through a mountain wilderness controlled by hostile Blackfoot Indians. It was also troubled by a bunch of tough hard-rock miners, many of whom would rather dig gold from a Holloday express box than from a mine shaft. With some second thoughts about the wisdom of establishing a mail service on such a dangerous road, he sent his first stage north in July, 1864, to begin a run 450 miles long. Holloday had not received a mail contract until shortly before that time, so he had to hastily move thirty coaches and nearly three hundred mules from the eastern end of his line. Superintendent Bob Spottswood was notified of the urgency of getting the equipment in place by July 1st; and by working day and night he got the coaches and livestock to Salt Lake City just in time to make the first run north. Little of the road had been surveyed by then, and there were few stations in place; nevertheless, Spottswood sent the first mail north on time. Bob Spottswood was a valued employee, and in a few years would head his own stage company in Colorado.

Within days, stagecoaches carrying loads of heavy gold dust and bars of bullion were rolling south to Salt Lake City. A shipment of new Concord coaches was ordered from Abbot & Downing for the Montana line, and with an eye on the many shady characters who frequented its lonely miles, an announcement was made that shotgun guards would begin riding the coaches regularly. With his new Boise Basin line and the hastily-organized Montana route, Holloday had added another thousand miles of road as well as the coaches, livestock,

men and equipment they represented to his Overland Mail Line. On the surface, Holloday's business appeared to be prospering, but dark clouds were on the horizon, in the person of William Dinsmore. With his connections to Wells Fargo, he had been the nemesis of the Adams Express and the Butterfield mail, and he was about to claim still another trophy from the ranks of western stagecoaching.

When new bids for the mail contract on the Atchison to Placerville route were opened in 1864, Ben Holloday must have gone into shock when William Dinsmore won the bid on the western half of the route, Salt Lake City to Placerville, with a bid of \$385,000. Holloday was lucky to keep his contract on the eastern section, from Atchison to Salt Lake City, with a low bid of \$350,000. Holloday had routinely underbid all competitors, so he probably never expected anyone to underbid him. Until then, Dinsmore had been a shadowy figure, known to few not privy to the highest levels of high finance. As already related, he had earlier been associated with Adams Express, the Butterfield Overland Mail and Wells Fargo. It was suspected that he was the instigator of Holloday's troubles with the Western Stage Line.

Although Dinsmore now held the mail contract, he did not own a single mile of road, so he agreed to sublet his contract to Holloday on the road west of Salt Lake City, but at a rate so low that Holloday could make almost no profit on that part of the line. Even so, Holloday had to accept Dinsmore's offer, for his stage line was already in place, and it would have ruined him financially if he failed to carry the mail his other contracts demanded. But worse yet, Dinsmore awarded the right to carry express, or treasure, not to Holloday, but to McLane's Pioneer Stage Line, without doubt a political move, since the Pioneer Line was already in the hands of Wells Fargo. A large part of Holloday's income was from his express business, carrying gold and silver shipments, but since almost all of his express business originated in the mining areas west and north of Salt Lake City, he would now profit far less from that business.

To offset his financial losses, Holloday increased fares from Atchison to Salt Lake City to \$350 plus \$1.50 for every pound of luggage in excess of twenty-five pounds. Fares to the new camps in Idaho, Nevada and Montana were raised to \$500. Soon afterwards another blow again sent Holloday reeling, for Dinsmore sublet his lucrative Virginia City, Nevada road, along which all of the express business from the Comstock mines was shipped, to the Pioneer Line. It was one of the few branch lines which was self-supporting, making large profits from express shipments, with almost no Indian problems.

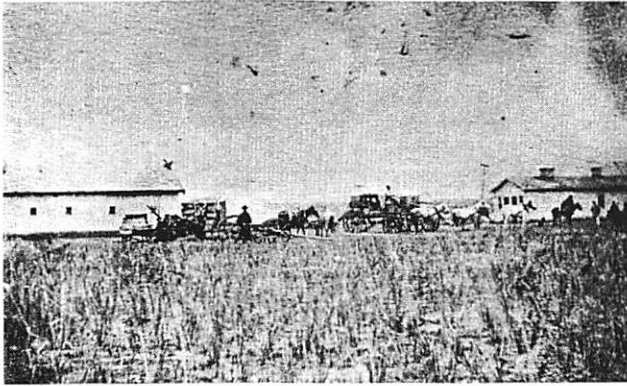
To follow the back trail of William Dinsmore and Louis McLane requires careful study and research. It will be recalled that Jared Crandall established one of the first California stage lines, known as the Pioneer Stage Line, during California's golden days. He later merged with Warren Hall to form the Hall & Crandall

line, after which his Pioneer Line went through several changes of hands. By the early 1860s, it was the main road from Sacramento to the Comstock mines at Virginia City, Nevada. As early as 1860, Louis and Charles McLane gained control of the Pioneer Line and invested a half million dollars in roads and equipment. But even before that early date, Louis McLane had been the California agent for Wells Fargo. Both McLane brothers were shrewd businessmen, so the roads they built were toll roads. Between Sacramento and Virginia City, a traveller had to pay \$15 in tolls to use their road. By the mid-1860s they were collecting some \$600,000 in tolls every year from travellers using their roads, so they could well afford to operate their coaches without a mail contract. Wells Fargo saw an opportunity to enter the western stagecoach business through the Pioneer Line, so on December 15, 1864, an agreement was made in which Wells Fargo took over the operation of McLane's stage line. Soon afterwards, all of Wells Fargo's widespread operations were consolidated, at which time Louis McLane became president of Wells Fargo.

To add to Holloday's troubles, he had no sooner rebuilt the old Leavenworth & Pikes Peak Express into a paying proposition providing reasonably good service to passengers, than Indian attacks began to plague the line again. His problems started in western Utah along the old Chorpenning route between Salt Lake City and the Carson River. Ford Cook, agent for Wells Fargo, was superintendent of that division west. That Cook, a trusted Wells Fargo employee, was in charge of that section of line left little doubt that Holloday's Overland Mail Company was slowly falling into the hands of William Dinsmore.

On March 2, 1863, Snake Indians believed to have been led by Chief Pocatello attacked and captured Prairie Gate, or Eight Mile Station, on the west side of the Deep Creek Mountains along the Utah-Nevada border, killing the station agent and a stock tender. As driver Hank Harper brought his east-bound stage into the station, he saw their bodies on the ground and turned his stage off the roadway and made a run for it. He had gone only a short way when Indian arrows tore into him, and also wounded a passenger, John Livingston, father of two small boys who were riding inside the coach. Judge Gordon Mott, a passenger who was also Nevada's delegate to Congress, saw Harper fall from the driver's seat, still clutching the reins. Judge Mott climbed out of the racing coach and climbed to the driver's seat, although he later said he didn't know how he made it, and took the reins from Harper's fingers. Judge Mott raced the pursuing Indians and brought the stage safely into Deep Creek Station, eight miles further east, where the Indians broke off their attack. Driver Harper was dead, but passenger Livingston survived his wounds.

A few weeks later, on May 19, driver Riley Simpson was killed along the same stretch of road, near Ibapah or Deep Creek Station, and once more a passenger, this time Howard Egan, superintendent of that section of road, climbed onto the driver's seat and brought the stage through safely. The following week driver Nick



Deep Creek Station, Utah. Many stagecoaches were attacked by Indians and outlaws along this desert road.

Wilson was only two miles from Canyon Station when the stage was shot at by attackers hidden behind rocks and brush alongside the road. Wilson's off-wheel horse was shot, and in his report Wilson described what happened:

I threw off the brake, cracked my whip and away we went, plunging down the hill and dragging the dead horse along until we were out of gunshot range. I stopped the team and unharnessed the dead horse, hitched one of my leaders in its place and made it into Deep Creek Station. It must have been Indians, for stage robbers would have followed us and finished the job.

On June 10, Wood Reynolds, also a driver, and one passenger were killed only twenty-five miles south of Salt Lake City, near Porter Rockwell's station. Their bodies were terribly mutilated. On July 8, Gosiute Indians attacked Canyon Station, burning it and killing the agent, "Deaf Bill" Riley, as well as four soldiers who had been sent out to patrol the line. Riley's body was thrown onto the roof of the burning station. The Indians scalped all of the soldiers except one who was bald, but his red beard was taken to decorate their lodge pole. At that time Colonel Connor had as many as thirty of his Fort Douglas soldiers stationed along the west desert road, with their main bivouac located at Government Creek, south of Simpson Springs. In one battle, Captain A. Smith and his troops killed nine Indians suspected of attacking the Overland Mail stage. In only four months, sixteen stage line employees and passengers were killed and seven coaches burned between Salt Lake City and Prairie Gate, on the Nevada border.

Senator Schuyler Colfax made a cross-country trip by stage, and at Salt Lake City gave an address on his feelings about the Indian attacks.

If I ever had any love for the "Noble Redman," it has pretty much evaporated during this trip. I do not think as much of him as I did. They were looking down from the hills at us, and had it not been that I had my hair cut so short at Atchison before leaving, it might have paid them to stop us, to take our scalps!

Conditions weren't much better east of Salt Lake City. In August, 1865, a coach was burned and nine men



A mud wagon mail stage arriving at Kimball's Station, Utah.

and women were killed while soldiers were patrolling the line between Fort Douglas and the Green River, in southwestern Wyoming. East of Green River the troops were spread too thin to stop Indian attacks. Nearly every station between Green River and Julesburg had been burned or damaged by Indians. Captain Robert Burton of the Mormon Nauvoo Legion reported seeing large quantities of mail blowing in the wind and scattered all along the road. At Ice Spring station he found twenty-two sacks of mail, eight of them cut open and emptied onto the prairie. During a one month period during the summer of 1864, only one mail stage made it through to Salt Lake City from the east. The western mail had to be routed by ship to Panama and up the Pacific Coast to San Francisco. From there mail destined for Salt Lake City was shipped via the Pioneer Line to Virginia City and from there by Holloday coaches to Utah—a 9,500 mile trip! It took more than four months for some letters to reach Salt Lake City from Atchison!

Between his problems with Dinsmore diverting his high paying express business from the Comstock mines,

and the huge cost of rebuilding stations destroyed by Indians, Holloday was kept busy answering complaints from both the public and the Postmaster General. What had once been a daily stage and mail delivery had deteriorated into a bi-weekly service, and then to whenever the stage could get through. Many believed that Holloday was sacrificing passenger safety in order to make more money from his express business. One newspaper editor wrote:

The trouble with the Overland Mail is with Ben Holloday's grasping and speculative spirit. He has so many enterprises at hand that he does justice to none of them. He makes money on his Montana line, and therefore neglects the Overland Mail. The mails are scandalously delayed, thousands of letters are lost. It would be a benefit if Congress would declare him a public nuisance, to be abated!

And Ben Holloday's troubles were about to be compounded.